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GOETHE'S *TASSO*, 511-513.

In the third scene of the first act of Goethe's *Tasso*, shortly after the Princess has placed the wreath of laurel on Tasso's brow, prefiguring, as the Duke puts it, the poet's later coronation at the Capitol in Rome, and after the extremely sensitive Tasso has declared his unworthiness of, and his inability to support, the distinction, the Duke admonishes him, with true worldly wisdom (lines 502-507):

Wer früh erwirbt, lernt früh den hohen Wert
Der holden Güter dieses Lebens schätzen;
Wer früh genießt, entbehrt in seinem Leben
Mit Willen nicht, was er einmal besass;
Und wer besitzt, der muss gerüstet sein.¹

To this sententious remark, Tasso replies:

Und wer sich rüsten will, muss eine Kraft
Im Busen fühlen, die ihm nie versagt.
Ach! sie versagt mir eben jetzt! Im Glück
Verlässt sie mich, die angeborne Kraft,
Die standhaft mich dem Unglück, stolz dem Unrecht
Begegnen lehrte. (508-513)

We are not at all surprised at the employment of "stolz" in this connection, but "standhaft" needs some explanation, in view of the opinion generally held of the choleric poet. Most commentators, virtually all, in fact, either do not notice the seeming inappropriateness of the word or they prefer to say nothing about it. Calvin Thomas, however, has the following note on the line (512) in his edition (Boston, Heath): "Of Tasso's steadfastness in meeting misfortune . . . we hear nothing in the authorities. On the contrary, Serassi expressly imputes to him 'little firmness' (*poco fermezza*)." Quite true. But Goethe does not always follow the accepted authorities, such as Serassi, to show which we need only call to mind the love relation between the Tasso and the Princess of his drama. Even if all critical bio-

¹ The verbs "erwerben," "geniessen," and "besitzen" have, in this passage, the pregnant meanings given them in the Storm-and-Stress period. Cf. the author's article in *Modern Language Notes*, XXIV, 80ff. and 101ff. In the 17th Book of *Dichtung und Wahrheit* Goethe says that the younger generation of those days had come to think that nobility of birth was of no real value to an individual unless by his own life and work he had acquired personal nobility. The above lines from *Tasso* picture the attitude likely to be assumed by one who early in life is permitted to enjoy special distinction as the fruit of his own labors.

graphers should impute little firmness to the Tasso of history, that would not prevent the legendary Tasso's being possessed of great firmness. It is, therefore, in the Tasso-legend that we must look for the source of this alleged steadfastness. And we find it in Casoni and the Abbé de Charnes.²

On the 9th and 10th pages of the first signature of Casoni's un-paged essay we find a very brief account of the precocious Torquato's childhood. After telling how the Prince of Salerno, on losing the favor of Emperor Charles V., fled from his native country, and how his secretary, Bernardo Tasso, followed him, Casoni continues: "fù Torquato, benchè fanciullo innocente, compagno of del loro esilio, com' egli di se stesso scrisse.

Lasso, e seguì con mal sicure piante,
Qual Ascanio, ò Camilla, il Padre errante.

Così ne' primi suoi anni incominciò egli à conoscere, come la virtù sia un' alta torre, combattutta ogn' ora dalla fortuna. Soffrì egli questo contrario avvenimento con animo forte, ben che nell' età di diece anni, poichè poco curando l'esilio, e la perdita delle facoltà paterne, disse, Io ti ringratio, fortuna, che spogliandomi de' tuoi beni, mi dai occasione di cercare quelli della Filosofia."

The sentence, "Soffrì egli questo contrario avvenimento con animo forte," translated into the language of Goethe, would read:

² In an article on the literary sources of Goethe's *Ur-Tasso*, in the *Flügel Memorial Volume*, appearing in the series of Publications of the Leland Stanford Junior University, I have shown that we should not posit Manso's biography of Tasso as Goethe's chief source, before he read Serassi, for there is absolutely no positive evidence that he ever read Manso. His early sources were:

1. Kopp's introduction to his German translation of the *Gerusalemme liberata*,
2. Casoni's short essay, in Italian, on Tasso, bound in at the end of the second volume of the 1705 Venice edition of the *Gerusalemme liberata*,
3. Heinse's essay on Tasso, published in Jacobi's *Iris*, and, possibly—
4. The biography by the Abbé de Charnes.

The Kopp and Casoni were in Goethe's father's library. Kopp says of his own sources: "Das Leben des Tasso hat sein vertrauter Freund, Johann Baptista Manso, Marchese di Villa, umständlich beschrieben; noch weitläufiger aber ist die Lebensbeschreibung, welche ein ungenannter Franzose (der nach des Crescimbeni Berichte der Abbé de Charnes seyn soll) unter dem Titel: *La vie du Tasse, Prince des poëtes Italiens*, à Paris, 1690 und 1695 in 12 herausgegeben hat." Certainly it were just as reasonable to suppose that young Wolfgang, after reading this statement, would turn to the French biography as to assume that he would read the Italian.

Er begegnete standhaft dem [diesem] Unglück, and the spirit of the rest of the quotation would justify adding: stolz dem Unrecht. Whereas Manso endows his hero with every good quality he can find a name for, Casoni is far less lavish, and this heroic virtue stands out with such prominence that it is the one characteristic of the poet which the reader is likely to remember.

In the Abbé de Charnes we read, with reference to the edict outlawing the Prince of Salerno, and with him Bernardo Tasso and his eight-year-old son Torquato (p. 16f.): "La nouvelle en étant venuë à Rome quelqu'un la dit au jeune Tasse, ajoutant que cette sentence qui le condamnoit comme rebelle, le privoit de tous ses biens. Il écouta celui qui luy parloit avec *la fermeté d'un Philosophe*, & au lieu de luy répondre: Je te rends graces, Fortune, s'écria-t-il, de m'avoir osté tous tes biens, j'auray plus de liberté désormais d'acquérir ceux que donne la vertu." In an earlier passage we read (p. 6f.): "Ceux qui eurent soin de luy dés-le maillot, remarquerent qu'il n'y eut jamais rien d'enfantin dans ses paroles que le son de la voix: il ne rioit presque jamais, il ne pleuroit jamais aussi: on vit dés-lors en luy cette *égalité d'esprit*, qui lui fut d'un si grand usage dans les longs malheurs de sa vie." In another connection, after the recital of how Tasso had received the report that a slanderer had been defaming him in public and everywhere, we read (p. 57): "C'est ainsi que sa Philosophie le mettoit à couvert de ces insultes, qui ne troubloient nullement sa *tranquillité*." As in the essay of Casoni, this virtue is given such prominence by the Abbé that the reader of his biography could not well help remembering it.

In view, then, of the way in which these two authors emphasize the outstanding trait of the legendary young Tasso, we must concede to Goethe's character the full right to use "standhaft" in the way in which he employs it.

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